

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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December 4, 2023

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. SE 2023-0081
v.	:	A.C. No. 40-02964-566985
	:	
DYNO NOBEL	:	

BEFORE: Jordan, Chair; Althen, Rajkovich, and Baker, Commissioners

ORDER

BY THE COMMISSION:

This matter arises under the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq. (2018) (“Mine Act”). On January 18, 2023, the Commission received from Dyno Nobel a motion seeking to reopen a penalty assessment that had become a final order of the Commission pursuant to section 105(a) of the Mine Act, 30 U.S.C. § 815(a).

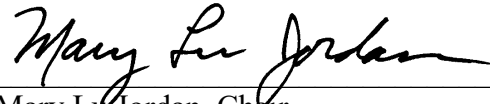
Under section 105(a) of the Mine Act, an operator who wishes to contest a proposed penalty must notify the Secretary of Labor no later than 30 days after receiving the proposed penalty assessment. If the operator fails to notify the Secretary, the proposed penalty assessment is deemed a final order of the Commission. 30 U.S.C. § 815(a).

We have held, however, that in appropriate circumstances, we possess jurisdiction to reopen uncontested assessments that have become final Commission orders under section 105(a). *Jim Walter Res., Inc.*, 15 FMSHRC 782, 786-89 (May 1993) (“*JWR*”). In evaluating requests to reopen final orders, the Commission has found guidance in Rule 60(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, under which the Commission may relieve a party from a final order of the Commission on the basis of mistake, inadvertence, excusable neglect, or other reason justifying relief. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 2700.1(b) (“the Commission and its Judges shall be guided so far as practicable by the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure”); *JWR*, 15 FMSHRC at 787. We have also observed that default is a harsh remedy and that, if the defaulting party can make a showing of good cause for a failure to timely respond, the case may be reopened and appropriate proceedings on the merits permitted. *See Coal Prep. Servs., Inc.*, 17 FMSHRC 1529, 1530 (Sept. 1995).

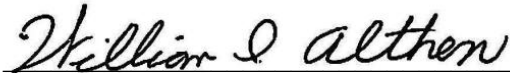
Records of the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on December 2, 2022, and

became a final order of the Commission on January 2, 2023. Dyno Nobel asserts that its failure to timely contest the proposed assessment arose from administrative error and inadvertent mistake. It claims that it received the assessment during the holiday period, but that personnel were absent, and their offices were closed. As a result of insufficient staffing, the assessment was inadvertently not forwarded to Dyno Nobel's counsel for a timely filing of the contest. The citation was also mistaken for another, related citation that had been issued on the same date. According to the operator, the error was discovered after proactively checking MSHA's data retrieval system and finding that the final order was issued in its case. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen, but urges the operator to take steps to ensure that future penalty contests are timely filed.

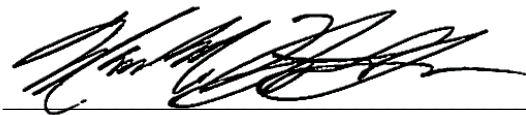
Having reviewed Dyno Nobel's request and the Secretary's response, we find that the operator's failure arose from administrative error and inadvertent mistake due to the insufficient staffing, closures, and confusion from the other citation issued on the same date. In the interest of justice, we hereby reopen this matter and remand it to the Chief Administrative Law Judge for further proceedings pursuant to the Mine Act and the Commission's Procedural Rules, 29 C.F.R. Part 2700. Accordingly, consistent with Rule 28, the Secretary shall file a petition for assessment of penalty within 45 days of the date of this order. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 2700.28.



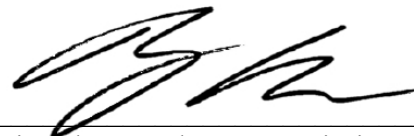
Mary Lu Jordan, Chair



William I. Althen, Commissioner



Marco M. Rajkovich, Jr., Commissioner



Timothy J. Baker, Commissioner

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